

Hoosier Heritage Alliance: A Partnership to Safeguard Indiana's Collections

1. Need and Rationale

The Indiana Historical Society (IHS) – with project partners Association of Indiana Museums, Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority, Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art, Conner Prairie Living History Museum, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Minnetrista Cultural Foundation, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and The Lincoln Museum – seeks a Connecting to Collections Statewide Planning Grant from IMLS to create a comprehensive statewide assessment of collections conservation needs and develop collections management strategies to address these needs. The project will bring together, for the first time, major Indiana institutions with diverse expertise and experience in collecting cultural artifacts to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of all Indiana's heritage collections.

According to the recent Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections (HHI), the greatest preservation needs of collecting institutions throughout the country are those relating to environmental control, adequate storage capabilities, emergency or disaster preparedness, staff training and funding. To the best of our knowledge, these are the same critical issues that are facing Indiana institutions. However, while the HHI survey had a representative sample of 63 Indiana organizations, there are more than 1,200 organizations in Indiana that are custodians of heritage collections. A broader survey of more organizations would capture a more precise assessment of Indiana's specific needs, pinpoint the specific collections and areas in most need, and increase awareness of collections care among Indiana organizations, both large and small.

Thus, this project proposes to perform an interactive statewide assessment – using the unmatched outreach tools of the project partners – to gain a greater understanding of Indiana's needs and advocate for the care of its heritage collections in the future. The IHS, with the editorial and methodological input of the highly experienced project partners, will develop and facilitate a survey for organizations that collect or archive the following types of heritage collections: historic artifacts, works of art, manuscripts, books, documents, photographic media including prints and negatives, moving images, sound recordings, and digital materials. The project team will then analyze the data, make a set of recommendations specific to Indiana's needs and then develop a plan of action.

The goals of the project are:

- To create an exceptional partnership between Indiana institutions with a shared commitment to the responsible stewardship of Indiana collections. The strength of this partnership is in the depth of experience in all areas of heritage collecting and the breadth of the organizations' statewide contacts and constituencies.
- Receive feedback from at least one third of Indiana collecting organizations in order to achieve a current and authentic understanding of the critical issues that face Indiana's heritage collections.
- Make realistic recommendations and develop a viable action plan to achieve these recommendations.
- Increase awareness among all Indiana institutions about collections care, especially those that are small and/or volunteer-run and are unaware of sources like the HHI report. The survey process will help organizations gain an understanding of the value of determining measurable goals, engaging in strategic decision making, sustaining an active planning process, and striving for institutional sustainability.

There are several conditions that make this project extremely crucial for the health of Indiana collections. First, the most recent statewide assessment of Indiana museum collections was performed in 1991 by the POLIS Research Center for the Association of Indiana Museums (AIM). This study found a “strong undercurrent of concern among Indiana museums” about the management and care of their collections. Fewer than 50% of the museums that responded felt that they provided adequate climate control. More than 60% had no written conservation plan. A lack of financial and human resources prevented many museums from addressing their collections concerns.ⁱ

In addition to being significantly outdated, the 1991 assessment only covered Indiana museums and documented 900,000 collection items in Indiana. However, according to AIM's most recent directory, there are actually 6,434,477 collection items held by Indiana museums, and this does not even include libraries with special collections, genealogical groups, or historical societies without museums. While the Indiana State Historic Records Advisory Board conducted a 2006 survey of records repositories, this survey dealt with records and not three-dimensional artifacts. It is critical that the condition and preservation needs of the three-dimensional artifacts in museums, archives, historical societies, historic sites and libraries be adequately evaluated. This project, therefore, aims to finally perform a current assessment that covers all of these groups in one comprehensive survey.

Another factor that makes this project important for Indiana is that, unlike many states, there has been a lack of state funding and resources dedicated to programs that work to ensure the safeguarding and protection of Indiana collections. Consequently, there have been no inclusive or incremental standards applied to the care of collections throughout the state. Many Indiana organizations – especially those that have an extremely small staff or are volunteer-run – are in critical need of support and training in order to ensure the proper care of their collections. This project will not only determine the level of this need, but will create steps to develop statewide programs and identify potential funding sources (at the state and federal levels) to support collections care.

2. The Planning Process

The project brings together seven Indiana collections-holding institutions – specifically those with mature collections and extensive experience in collections management – and two statewide organizations to form an advisory committee with the knowledge and statewide outreach to effectively address Indiana's needs. Further, both IHS and AIM have a long history of providing service and special training in collections care for Indiana organizations, and the Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority provides services to libraries statewide. These outreach and service tools are essential to the successful implementation of this project.

This project is essentially a five-step process:

1. **Create a survey that asks Indiana collecting institutions to describe the quantity and condition of their collections and provide details on aspects of collections care, including environment, storage facilities, preservation activities, funding and staffing.** The aim is to create a survey that will provide adequate information about collections but is not too long or daunting to prevent organizations – especially small ones – from participating. The methodology will be determined by the project partners, including a collection strategy that most effectively garners participation in the survey.

The project will target institutions with heritage collections; historic structures themselves are not included, but the artifacts within the structures will be included in the assessment, which constitutes a significant portion of the state's collections. This specific project's scope will not include the state and local government records that are under the purview of the State Archives and government officials.

2. **Distribute the paper-based survey, via mail, to approximately 1,200 eligible institutions that are categorized into one of five types: museums, historical societies, archives, genealogical groups, and libraries with special collections.** The mailing list and contact information for these organizations will come, in large part, from a questionnaire jointly produced by AIM and the IHS in early 2008 that will provide accurate, up-to-date contact information for these organizations. The remainder will come from the project partners' databases. The IHS, AIM, and Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority have the largest databases in Indiana and have long-standing relationships with organizations of all sizes.

The surveys will be publicized through the communications channels of each partners' institution, as determined by the data collection strategy. The survey will be announced at AIM's Annual Conference,

August 24-25, 2008, with a conference session devoted to the purpose and value of the survey and strategies for completing it.

3. **Collect data from organizations.** A Collections Survey Assistant (CSA), a part-time position, will be hired as part of this project to collect data from organizations and facilitate the completion of the surveys. The CSA will mail reminder or thank-you letters or postcards, distribute email reminders, or make personal phone calls to institutions after the survey is been distributed, as determined by the data collection strategy. As surveys are collected, the CSA will enter the data into an ACCESS database and standardize the entries.

The CSA will offer training and support to some of the smaller organizations that will need help in completing the survey. The CSA will offer phone and email support and hold individual or group training sessions throughout the state as needed. The CSA will work to ensure participation by a representative sample of the different types of organizations. In addition, the Local History Services (LHS) division of the IHS will initiate its "In Your Neighborhood" meeting series in early 2008. LHS staff will travel to sites around the state for informal consultations. These meetings in 2008 and 2009 could include discussion of the survey and assistance to complete it.

Expected results: Comprehensive data from a valid sample of the various collections in the state adequately representing each of the five types of institutions and a range of institution sizes. The goal is participation of at least 33% of institutions.

4. **Analyze data.** The CSA will tabulate the findings and perform preliminary analysis of the data. The project partners will review preliminary findings and provide input on the analysis and identification of the survey's key findings. *Expected results:* Thorough analysis of the survey results in a manner that informs the set of recommendations; strategy for addressing the findings; validation or amendment of high risk areas (per the HHI findings; and prioritization of needs in Indiana.
5. **Make recommendations and create action plan.** The partners will prepare a report outlining key findings and an action plan that is peer reviewed by the partner organizations and relevant staff experts and then revised, communicated and publicized. Fundamental to the plan will be the establishment of practical, measurable steps that can be acknowledged and implemented on the local level. *Expected Results:* A plan that identifies objectives or "next steps" to be taken, per the defined priorities, and strategies for taking those steps. These steps will include: 1). Identification of training needs and a proposal for developing materials and implementing training sessions; 2). Creation of disaster planning and emergency response at a regional level; 3). Prioritization of funding needs and identification of sources; and 4). Creation of a public awareness tools. Strategies will involve establishing regional networks for training and resource sharing; developing a matrix for establishing preservation priorities; and developing and providing training for community hands-on efforts to help solve storage issues.

Project Partners. The partners and the nature of this new collaboration are truly the keys to the success of this project. Never before have large collections-holding institutions come together in Indiana to specifically address the needs of collections care. Each organization brings experienced staff members with a special knowledge base about collections to the project. Also, the distinct community presence and constituency of each organization will help ensure large-scale participation and a more accurate portrait of Indiana's needs.

Indiana Historical Society: The IHS maintains the largest collection of materials on the history of Indiana and the Old Northwest, including over 1.6 million photographs, 45,000 cataloged printed items, 1100 cataloged maps, 575 broadsides, 14,000 pieces of sheet music, 3,300 artifacts, 60 original paintings, and 5,000 processed manuscript collections, and 33,000 online digital images.

The IHS is the lead institution on this project, in part, because of the experience and expertise of its Local History Services (LHS) and Conservation departments. For more than 25 years, LHS has provided hands-on

training, advice, communication channels, and other forms of assistance designed to address the needs of Indiana's historical societies, local archives, and museums throughout the state. Two full-time and one part-time staff members, who are members of the Field Services Alliance, offer services designed to help the state's local organizations better achieve their own missions and incrementally increase their professional standards in tackling the wide range of organizational responsibilities. The LHS's extensive contacts and service throughout the state will be integral to this project.

The IHS also brings to the project the expertise of its Conservation and Preservation Imaging Departments. Under the umbrella of the Historic Document Preservation program, these departments provide professional expertise that benefits the physical needs of collections in small museums within the region, from initial examination and handling, provision of customized housings, comprehensive conservation laboratory treatment and reformatting of originals via microfilm, digital scanning or digital conversion. Since 1990, IHS has provided collection assessments through the Heritage Preservation Collection Assessment Program (CAP) under the auspices of IMLS.

Association for Indiana Museums (AIM): AIM, founded in 1972, is the statewide organization that provides a network for Indiana museums, offers resources and training, and advocates for their advancement. AIM publishes *The Bulletin*, a monthly newsletter to members, and *The Directory of Indiana Museums*, the state's only comprehensive listing is published biennially. AIM's statewide relationships and communications channels are vital to this project.

Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority (INCOLSA): INCOLSA is the statewide network providing leadership in cooperative activities for Indiana libraries. INCOLSA serves 768 member institutions, including 313 school corporations, 233 public library systems, 136 special libraries, and 86 colleges and universities. These member institutions represent more than 2,200 libraries throughout Indiana.

The Eiteljorg Museum: The Eiteljorg in Indianapolis contains one of the best Native American and Western art collections in the world, including traditional and contemporary work. It is the only museum of its kind in the Midwest and brings to this project its vast experience in Native American and Western artifacts, which will be invaluable in assessing the needs of the large number of Native American materials in Indiana.

Conner Prairie: Conner Prairie is a large, open-air living history museum in Fishers, Indiana with a vast collections that reflect the material culture of average people living in 19th century Indiana, including textiles, ceramics, agricultural implements, furniture, cookware, books, and more. Conner Prairie has a remarkable fully-cataloged, annually-inventoried collection and can advise on best practices for collections management.

Indianapolis Museum of Art: The Indianapolis Museum of Art has a collection of over 50,000 works of art, including Contemporary and decorative arts; prints; drawings; photographs; textiles; and fashion. Many heritage collections include pieces of art, and the IMA can advise on the special care and conditions required for art.

Minnetrista Cultural Foundation: Minnetrista is a museum and cultural center in Muncie, Indiana that serves the people of East Central Indiana. Minnetrista collects objects and archival materials that comprise the cultural heritage of East Central Indiana; its library and archives is a repository for the area's written and photographic history. This institution is a regional leader for other repositories.

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana (HLFI): HFLI saves and restores irreplaceable architectural heritage, from outstanding national landmarks to modest historic houses, barns and bridges. HFLI will provide expertise on the maintenance of collections within historic structures. HFLI's role in the project is especially important, given that many museums and historical societies throughout the state are housed in historic structures themselves.

The Lincoln Museum: The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana houses the world's largest private collection dedicated to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, including signed copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th amendment; 19th century prints, engravings, newspapers, original photographs, sheet music, and period artifacts; Lincoln family belongings; and manuscript collections. This museum is a regional leader and will be highly visible over the next two years during the celebration of the Lincoln Bicentennial.

The Indiana State Museum: The Indiana State Museum is not listed as an official partner in this application but supports the project and is interested in participating in the advisory committee if the project is funded.

Roles and Responsibilities

The IHS, as the lead institution, will manage the project's primary phases to include:

- Providing general project management and support (including such in-house expertise and consultations from the Local History Services, Collections, and Conservation Preservations departments)
- Hiring, supervising, and advising Collections Survey Coordinator to carry out the survey, collect results in a format to be synthesized and analyzed further, and prepare preliminary reports for the advisory committee, etc., in accordance with the timeline and best practices.
- Facilitating timely communications needed to achieve the goals of this project during its primary phases, including those with the advisory committee, the target audience, selected media, etc.
- Developing action plan with advisory committee and such staff experts as they may designate.
- Directing the preparation of a preliminary report, incorporation of advisory committee feedback, etc. and subsequent issuance of final report and recommendations.

The project partners will form the project advisory committee that will:

- Primarily provide expert advice, feedback, and other support at critical points during the entire project.
- Attend a project "kick-off meeting" within the first thirty days of the grant's project period and respond to preliminary timeline and provide summary input regarding survey work.
- Attend a subsequent "survey launch meeting" to finalize version of proposed survey tools and methods.
- Promote completion of surveys by representatives of the member institutions and their affiliates, peers, etc. through communications channels in coordination with IHS.
- Attend a "post-survey results meeting" or otherwise provide timely feedback to review and respond to preliminary findings, reports, and possible strategic recommendations resulting from analysis of survey results. Advise in prioritization of needs, recommend areas to emphasize and steps for action plan.
- Attend a "final project meeting" to review and respond to draft of final report and action plan.

3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

Project personnel includes a Collections Survey Assistant, to be hired on a part-time basis for the duration of the project; IHS staff members including the Senior Director of Collections, Senior Director of Conservation, Director of LHS and Assistant Director of LHS; and a staff member from each project partner (see attached Project Staff list). The budget allocated for the projects covers the cost to employ the Collections Survey Assistant for 16 months at 20 hours a week. The budget also covers costs associated with the distribution of the survey, including printing, postage, and materials. Travel and phone costs are included for the survey completion outreach efforts outlined above. Each partner is contributing staff time to the project.

The IHS and the project partners are committed to creating a long-term collaboration that leverages our unique resources in order to safeguard Indiana's collections. At the completion of this planning project, the partners will finally have an accurate portrait of the state of Indiana's heritage collections, a set of recommendations and a plan to achieve them. The goal will then be to pursue additional funding to implement the plan, through state, private, or federal sources. In an implementation project, the partners can create programs that coordinate their efforts for collections care in the future; for instance, the IHS may focus their efforts on the preservation needs of paper collections, AIM may focus on disaster preparedness, the Indianapolis Museum of Art may focus on the care of art collections, etc.

The partnership created in this IMLS planning project – and the coordination of efforts in future implementation projects – have the potential to make a great impact on Indiana's cultural capital and is an outstanding use of the expertise and resources of Indiana's large collecting institutions.

ⁱ Hulse, Lamont J. *Museums in Indiana: Their Status and Need*. A Report Prepared for The Association of Indiana Museums by the POLIS Research Center, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. 1991